

LAUSD approves worst-case scenario budget plan

By Barbara Jones, Staff Writer LA Daily News

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The Los Angeles Unified board voted Tuesday for a worst-case budget-balancing plan that would gut popular programs like Adult and Early-Childhood Education for 2012-13, although a recent infusion of state money offers hope that some cuts may be restored by fall. | See photo gallery.

The board's 6-1 approval of a Fiscal Stabilization Plan came less than a month after it unanimously rejected a request to kill the popular Adult Education program, close hundreds of preschool and after-school programs and increase class sizes at most grade levels to close a \$557 million deficit.

Last week, however, LAUSD got word that it's getting \$180 million in unexpected lottery and other revenue that will allow it to keep K-8 class sizes at current levels, continue busing programs for magnet and athletic programs, and avert some of the cuts.

Staffers then tore up their plan for draconian cuts and began working on a series of scenarios that could restore even more of the programs if state revenue remains at current levels - or better - and the district's unions make concessions.

"The odds of this are in our favor," Superintendent John Deasy said, "I would like schools to prepare for this to be in place.

"This is a budget that is no way perfect," he added. "But it's clearly amazing."

With hundreds of noisy protesters demonstrating outside against any cuts, Deasy noted that the strategy - if it works - would save the programs for only the 2012-13 year.

"These are all Band-Aids, and that's not the way to save the system," he said.

To continue building on the district's success without having to tackle the painful budget process year after year, Deasy said voters need to get behind the \$298-a-year parcel tax that would raise about \$255 million annually for the next five years.

The parcel tax would have to be approved by two-thirds of the voters and would take effect in 2013.

The board's 6-1 vote on the parcel tax - board member Marguerite LaMotte dissented on both items - followed a lengthy and complicated briefing in which Deasy laid out four scenarios for closing the projected budget shortfall of \$390 million. The plans could change slightly or drastically, depending on how much money the state provides in its May 15 allocation to the district.

The first is considered the worst case, with no new revenue and no concessions from the district's unions. There would be seats on high school campuses for 46,000 secondary students taking credit-recovery classes through the Adult Education Division. However, all Adult Education schools and regional occupation centers would be closed, as would full-day preschool and after-school programs.

The Options programs for troubled youths would be closed or consolidated, and schools would also lose their librarians. Funding would also be eliminated for elementary arts classes, Clear Creek and Point Fermin Outdoor Education Centers, the Academic Decathlon program and the All-District Marching Band.

The second option would add \$60 million to the district's coffers if United Teachers Los Angeles drops its grievance over furlough days imposed by the district. The issue is currently in arbitration and officials hope it will be resolved by mid-April.

With that money, officials said they would be able to keep an unknown number of Adult Schools open to serve

45,000 high school and 100,000 adult students, with offerings including high-school diploma and some career training. The limited funding means that some 7,000 secondary and 150,000 adult students would be left out.

In addition, 84 of the 107 full-day preschool programs would be restored, with new, larger facilities allowing the current number of youngsters to be served.

In the third option, the district hopes to obtain \$220 million in concessions from its labor unions that could allow the restoration of Adult Ed programs for 200,000 students, some 50,000 short of the anticipated demand. The money would also allow the district to operate its elementary arts and music programs, keep librarians and aides on campus and restore a reading program for young English-language learners.

While the board members lauded LAUSD staff for its creative ways to salvage programs, the president of United Teachers Los Angeles wanted the district to use the windfall to save jobs instead. He noted that Los Angeles Unified has sent out more than 11,700 pink slips to employees who may be laid off if revenue falls short.

"When you say this is good news, it doesn't look quite like good news. It's on the horizon, but not yet," said UTLA president Warren Fletcher, who, like Deasy, is in his first year in office. "Never before has a California school district issued more than 10,000 layoff notices. If you follow through, this would destroy the district."

The final scenario would restore most of the programs, with an estimated \$173 million coming from an "ongoing sustainable revenue source," such as Gov. Jerry Brown's sales tax initiative.

Despite that infusion, some programs and administrative functions would still be lost. Officials said they hoped to obtain corporate sponsorships for the Academic Decathlon and the marching band, as well as the outdoor education centers in San Pedro and the Angeles National Forest.